

The Abhoga and its 'Signature'

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The *abhoga* is the last section of a Dhrupada composition, the first three being *sthayi*, *antara*, and *sanchari*. Generally the composer's name is found in the *abhoga* section, and this has antecedents in ancient literature as well as reflections in more recent musical practice in India. The present article attempts to provide linkages in the practice of appending 'signatures' to musical compositions. It is, however, a very brief exploration of this theme, and limited in its scope.

The evolution of Dhrupada and Khyal is related to the development of Prabandha, popular between approximately the seventh and the fourteenth centuries A.D. Prabandha compositions of the *shuddha suda* variety had four sections: *udgraha*, *melapaka*, *dhruva*, and *abhoga*. In the *salaga suda* variety, which developed later from the *shuddha suda* Prabandha, the sections were named *udgraha*, *dhruva*, *antara*, and *abhoga*. The Dhrupada is said to have grown out of the *salaga suda* variety of Prabandha; Raja Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior is believed to have pioneered and patronized its singing some time in the fourteenth century. In the later medieval period, the sections of the Dhrupada came to acquire the names still current, that is, *sthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari*, and *abhoga*. Although over a period of time the names of the first three sections changed, the name of the last section, *abhoga*, and its special feature — the names of the composer and his patron — were retained in Dhrupada compositions. In the Khyal, on the other hand, though the name of the composer found a place in the composition, the last section lost its old name. The *antara* of Khyal — the new name for *abhoga* — actually performs the function of *abhoga* in the sense that it completes the *bandish*.

The word 'abhoga' means expanse, extension. In the Prabandha the term was used because it completed the composition¹. It is interesting to see that the *Sangeeta Ratnakara* authorizes the signature in *abhoga*; it states that *abhoga* should always contain the composer's and the patron's name². Though it is an extended part of the composition, the *abhoga* is thus important from the composer's point of view. (Although *abhoga* marks the end of a Prabandha composition, the singing of Prabandha used to conclude on the *dhruva* section, because *dhruva* contained the refrain of the composition. Therefore, *melapaka* and *abhoga* could be deleted on occasion but not the *dhruva* section of a Prabandha³.)

As mentioned earlier, the practice of inserting the names of the composer and the patron at the end of a composition (even a poem or *kavya*) has a long tradition behind it, going right back to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. At the end of Uttarakanda in Valmiki's Ramayana, for example, we find this ascription to the author:

इत्यार्षे श्रीरामायणे वाल्मीकीये उत्तरकांडे चतुर्विंशति
सहस्रोत्तरकांड समाप्तं । श्रीरस्तु शुभं भवतु कल्याणं । १४

In the Mahabharata, every *parva* (chapter) ends with the name of Vyasarishi. An example

is quoted here from the Sabha-parva of the Mahabharata. The text cited is from the oldest manuscript of the epic with the commentary of Nilakantha⁵:

इति श्री महाभारते शतसाहस्र्यां संहितायां वैयासिक्यां अनुद्युत पर्वणी ध तराष्ट्रसंज्ञयस्वादे
एकाशीतितमो ध्यायः । समाप्तमनुद्युत पर्व । सभापर्व समाप्तम् ।

Similarly the Vayu Purana, which is supposed to be the genuine *mahapurana*, concludes with the signature of Vayu:

इति श्री महापुराणे वायुप्रोक्ते गयामहात्म्यं नाम पञ्चाशत्तमो ध्यायः समाप्तं इदं
वायुपुराणम् ।⁶

However, in Vedic mantras the practice of ascription seems to be different. The name of the *rishi* to whom the hymn is revealed, its god or goddess, and its metre are mentioned at the beginning of a mantra. For instance, the first mantra of Agni in Agneyakanda: 'This mantra's god is Agni, the metre is Gayatri, and Bhardwaja Brihaspatya is the *rishi* to whom it was revealed.'

The *akshiptikas* or the *jati prastaras* given in the *Sangeeta Ratnakara*, on the other hand, do not carry the composer's name. They are like hymns. For example, here is an excerpt from an *akshiptika* of Bhinna Kaishika:

इंद्रनील सप्रभं मदांघ्रमंदवासितं ।
एकदंतं शोभीतं नमामि तं विनायकं ।।⁷

The *Gatha Saptasati* of Hala is an anthology written in Maharashtri Prakrit. This compilation of seven hundred gathas is supposed to have been written in the first half of the first century. Here again, the author's name is mentioned at the end of the treatise:

इति श्री हालविरचिते प्राकृत काव्ये सप्तशते । सप्तमं शत समाप्तं गायानां स्वरूपरमणीयम् ।⁸

The Allahabad stone-pillar inscription of Samudragupta (c. A.D. 360) shows the same trend. The inscription is a poetic composition in praise of Samudragupta and is meant to be sung by the *bandijanas* and Magadhas. It is composed by Harisena who mentions his name at the end of the composition. The inscription, which is in Sanskrit, runs thus in English translation:

May this poetic composition of the Sandhi Vighraha, the Kumaramatyā, the Mahadandanayaka Harisena, who is the slave [at] the . . . feet of the Bhattaraka, whose intelligence is expanded by the favour of moving near [His majesty], who is a Khayatapakika and . . . the son of the Mahadandanayaka Dhruvabhuti, conduce to the welfare and happiness of all beings . . .⁹

The Prabandha continued this practice of inserting the poet's name in its last section, the

abhoga. Someshwara in his *Manasollasa* puts in at the end of the text:

सोमेश्वरदेवविरचिता एला हंसावती ।¹⁰

Jayadeva's *ashtapadis* in the *Gita Govinda* can also be cited as an example of this practice; the last section of every *ashtapadi* mentions his name. Here is the first *ashtapadi*:

श्री जयदेवकवेरिदमुदितमुदारम् ।
श्रुणु सुखदं शुभदं भवसारम् ।
केशव ध तदशविधरूप, जय जगदीश हरे ।।¹¹

As mentioned earlier, the name *abhoga* and its speciality were retained in *Dhrupada* compositions, which evolved from *Prabandhas*. We thus find many compositions belonging both to the temple and court traditions with *abhogas* containing the signature of the composer. Bakshu, Baiju, and Tansen among court singers of the Mughal period, and Swami Haridas, Surdas and others of the *Vaishnava sampradaya* kept up the tradition of *abhoga* in their compositions. Here is a Bakshu composition:

पूजो रे गणेश को गुनि ।
रिद्धि सिद्धि दाता विन्ध हरण दुनि ।।
जिन ध्यायो तिन पायो मन इच्छा भनि ।
बख्खु के प्रभु को ध्यावत सुर नर मुनि ।।

The saint poets of the medieval period — Meera, Kabir, Nanak of North India, and Dnyaneshwar, Namdeo, Tukaram, Purandaradasa, Tyagaraja, etc., of the South — also wove their names into their devotional *padas*. However, the patron's name appeared only in some compositions.

Although the terminology of the sections of *Dhrupada* changed in the nineteenth century from *udgraha*, *dhruva*, *antara* and *abhoga* to *sthayi*, *antara*, *sanchari* and *abhoga* — or sometimes *sthayi*, *antara*, *bhoga* and *abhoga* — the term *abhoga* remained unchanged. The *Kriti* and *Kirtana* of the South adopted the names *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *charanam* for the sections of each composition. Here again, the composer's name is found in the *charanam*, the last part of the composition. The example of a *Kriti* (in Nagari transliteration) is given below:

विनायका निनु विना ब्रो चुटकु [पल्लवी]
वेरेवरूरा विन्धराज
अनाशरक्षका नीवेगादा आदरिर्चननु ब्रोबरादा [अनुपल्लवी]
सरसिरूहारूणा युग चरणा
सततं श्र तजन संकट हरणा
परमक पा सागरा वरसगुणा
पालित जन गोपालदासननु [चरणम्]

Abhoga has different names in different regions. In the Braj country it is called *chhap*, in

Bengali it is called *bhanita*, in Marathi *mudrika*, and in Carnatic music *mudracharanam*.

In Khyal, which grew out of Dhrupada, the name abhoga became extinct although the composer's name appeared in the antara which in fact does the work of abhoga. Composers like Niamat Khan and Firoz Khan adopted poetic names like Sadaranga and Adaranga in their compositions, setting a new trend of composer's signature in North India. By suffixing the word *ranga*, many composers were able to coin aesthetically pleasing and musically appropriate names for themselves — Manaranga, Hararanga, Nadaranga, etc.

As we have seen, abhoga has an ancient past; its future, however, is uncertain, because the antara of Khyal is often neglected by singers of the present day. The significance of composition has diminished in a svara-dominated Khyal, and composers' signatures are not often to be found in Khyal compositions of recent times.

NOTES

1. आभोगस्त्वन्तिभो मतः ।
2. 38, ch. 4, S.R.
3. Kallinatha's commentary on 1.19, ch.4,S.R.
4. P. 240, Uttarakanda manuscript, Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, Pune. Manuscript No. 825/1875.
5. *Mahabharata with Nilakantha's Bharata Bhava Deepa Commentary*, tr. Ramnarayan Datta Shastry Pandeya Rama, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, 1867. (B.O.I., Pune).
6. *Vayu Purana*, ed. Khemraj Krishnadas, Shri Venkateshwara Press, Bombay.
7. 37 – 39, ch. 4, S.R.
8. *Gatha Saptashati*, ed. Radha Govinda Basak. Bibliotheca India Collection of Oriental Works, The Asiatic Society, 1971.
9. P. 193, *Intermediate Sanskrit Selections No. 2*.
10. P. 1, Ch. 20, *Manasollasa*.
11. *Gita-Govinda Kayam*, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi